



IKHTILĀF: A LOOK INTO SPHERES OF THE CONCEPT

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‘Ikhtilāf’ refers to a condition that comes about after stability; a condition that goes against the previous condition. If we consider this meaning, then everything in the universe, from the ground to the sky, will be seen as a field wherein a change of condition occurs. Day and Night, Months and Years, with the seasons in them are referred to as Ikhtilāf in Time.

Going ahead, we find Ikhtilāf in the animals, plants, and even solid things. Then there are different species in them and types under the species. Then, under each type, the individuals will differ too. Furthermore, there will be differences or Ikhtilāf in the nature, temperament, colour and other characteristics of each one.

The Ikhtilāf in Time and then animals, colours etc. clearly demonstrate that Ikhtilāf or changes or differences are the nature of this world.

Ikhtilāf in Guidance & Deviation:

The focus of our discussion in this article is not the changes or differences described above, but going beyond this, there is Ikhtilāf in Guidance (Hidāyat) and Deviation (Ḍalālat) – which is the focus of our discussion. If we look at this Ikhtilāf, then a brief glance at the world shows us that all the previous nations are on one side and the Ummah of Sayyiduna Muḥammad Rasūlullāh ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam is on the other side.

The personality of Sayyidunā Ibrāhīm ‘alayhi as-salām:

There was an Ikhtilāf that arose about the personality of this great messenger of Allāh Ta’ālā, whether he was a Jew or a Christian. Allāh Ta’ālā guided the Ummah of Sayyidunā Muḥammad Rasūlullāh ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam and informed them that he was not a Jew or a Christian, but he was Ḥanīf, i.e., treading the straight path, believing in Tauḥīd.

Similarly, there was an Ikhtilāf about Sayyidunā ‘Isā ‘alayhi as-salām, i.e., Jesus. The Jews denied him and the Christians made him into a deity. Allāh Ta’ālā blessed the Muslim Ummah and the straight path was decreed for them.

The day of Jumu’ah is also part of the Ikhtilāf that occurred. The previous nations chose Saturday and Sunday. The Muslim Ummah was guided in this matter and they chose Jumu’ah, i.e., Friday. The following verse of the Noble Qur’ān indicates to this Ikhtilāf,

‘If your Rabb had willed, he would have made all people a single nation. They will all be disputing.’ [Sūrah Hūd: 118]

A group of Mufasssīrīn explain that ‘disputing’ in this verse refers to the differences or Ikhtilāf between the Jews, Christians, Magians and Ḥanīfiyyah, whilst verse 119, ‘except those on whom your Rabb has mercy’ refers to the Ḥunafā’. It is probably for this reason that this Ummah has been referred to as the Ummah Marḥūmah, i.e., Ummah upon whom mercy has been showered.

Besides this Ikhtilāf, there is another form of Ikhtilāf decreed within this Ummah. It is the Ikhtilāf between the People of the Truth (Ahl-ul-Ḥaq) and the People of Falsehood (Ahl-ul-Bāṭil). Based on this, the deviated and astray sects will be referred to as ‘disputing’ and the People of the Truth will be addressed by ‘except those on whom your Rabb has mercy’.

In the verse of Sūrah Hūd quoted above, we see that ‘except those on whom your Rabb has mercy’ is contrasted with the ‘disputing’. This means that the entire humanity has been divided into two types.

1. The Ahl-ul-Ikhtilāf, i.e., those who dispute
2. The Marḥūmīn, i.e., those upon whom mercy is shown

This comparison gives us the understanding that those who dispute do not fall under the scope of those upon whom mercy is shown, and those who are under the divine mercy, in the light of the Noble Qur’ān, they are not included amongst those who dispute. In simple terms, it can be said that salvation is only for those who are under the mercy of Allāh Ta’ālā. In Sūrah Al-An’ām, this Ikhtilāf is further clarified,

‘This is indeed my straight path, so follow it. Do not follow other paths, for they will deviate you from Allāh’s path.’ [Sūrah Al-An’ām: 153]

In this verse, the straight path is described in the singular and for the Ahl-ul-Ikhtilāf, the word ‘paths’, i.e., the plural has been used. From this, it is established that the straight path is one, whilst the paths of deviation are many.

Now, if we analyze the verses quoted above, we reach the following conclusion:

In Sūrah Al-An’ām, we learn that there is one straight path and the deviated paths are many. In Sūrah Hūd, salvation is promised for one group and there is no salvation for the Ahl-ul-Ikhtilāf.

The discussion thus far is encapsulated in the following verse,

‘Mankind was a single community. Then Allāh sent out Ambiyā’ bringing good news and giving warning, and with them, He sent down the Book with truth to decide between people regarding their

differences. Only those who were given it differed about it, after the clear signs had come to them, envying one another. Then, by His permission, Allāh guided those who had īmān to the truth of that about which they had differed. Allāh guides whoever He wills to a straight path' [Sūrah Al-Baqarah: 213]

Allāh Ta'ālā sent Messengers to the world in order to end off the Ikhtilāf and put people onto the straight path, making their nations practice the revealed book. Regrettably, those who were not concerned of their end had utilized the book for purposes that created differences between them. In this way, the reason for which the book was revealed had been destroyed.

Now, let us see how this particular Ikhtilāf, i.e., described above, has been explained by the Noble Qur'ān,

‘As for those who divide up their religion and form into sects, you have nothing to do with them. Their affair will go back to Allāh and then He will inform them about what they did.’ [Sūrah Al-An'ām: 159]

According to Sayyidunā Ibn ‘Abbās raḍiyallāhu ‘anhuma, the sects and groups refer to the people of Hawā', i.e., those who follow their whims and desires.

We learn from this verse that Ikhtilāf that causes the Ummah to divide and split is disliked and frowned upon.

Types of Ikhtilāf:

1. Ikhtilāf in Dīn: Allāh Ta'ālā had revealed one religion for man. It was binding on man to tread this path. However, he did not keep to the straight path and in following his whims, he strayed, causing Ikhtilāf with those on the straight path. This caused man and communities to begin excommunicating others.
2. Ikhtilāf within one religion, if there are subsidiary differences, then too, it is tolerated and cannot be referred to as something bothersome. These differences do not cause hate or affect relationships. However, if these differences are increased to the level where they affect the principles and fundamentals of the religion, then the ruling will be different.

Now, when we look at the differences created by the Khawārij, Mu'tazilah, Shī'ah etc. then they affected the beliefs and fundamentals of Islām.

Causes of Ikhtilāf:

There are three main causes of Ikhtilāf:

1. Deficient and flawed knowledge
2. Following desires and whims
3. Following customs and ancient ways and habits

A ploy of the Modernists

In this age of liberalism and modernism, we find that a terrible trend has overcome us. There are some who use the differences within the Fiqh system to abolish a clear-cut instruction of the Sharī'ah. Alternatively, the differences are used to lessen the importance of a Shar'ī command and instruction.

If there is a difference in an issue, this does not stand as proof to stop adhering to a command or ruling. If there are differences on an issue, this does not give one the license to pick and choose what to do – this is, in essence, playing with the Shar’ī sources and texts like a toy. In reality, this is following the desires and Hawā’.

Imām Ibn ‘Abdul Barr raḥimahullāh said, ‘None of the scholars of the Ummah that I know of consider disagreements as proof except those who have no insight, knowledge or valid argument in their opinion.’

Now, we find Muslims with a Modernist mindset who, in following their desires, impress upon others that they tread the straight path by quoting a book here and there, or some vague reference to establish their flawed position or even quote aḥādīth and statements totally out of context to justify their wrong or modernist positions and actions.

One of the methods proffered by Modernists is to encourage people to follow concessions in basically everything, from acts of worship to basic purification rituals.

If we take a deep look into this, adhering to concessions on the basis that a difference of opinion exists, then the pious predecessors of the Ummah have warned about its impermissibility.

1. Sulayman At-Taymī raḥimahullāh said, ‘If you take the concessions from each scholar, then all of the evil will be gathered in you.’ [There is consensus upon this saying, as stated by Ibn ‘Abdul Barr raḥimahullāh].

2. Ibrāhīm Ibn Abī ‘Ulya raḥimahullāh said, ‘Whoever looks for the shādh (irregular or exceptional views and opinions) has been led astray.’

3. Awzā’ī raḥimahullāh said, ‘Whoever only takes the uncommon opinions of the scholars has left Islām.’

4. Al-Ghazālī raḥimahullāh said, ‘The layman should not pick the opinion most pleasant to him from each school, they will expand it.’
5. Ibn ‘Abidīn raḥimahullāh said, ‘The correct stance according to us is that the truth is one and that purposely following the concessions is sinful.’

One of the most problematic issues with following the concessions and uncommon views is that it defeats the Maqṣad (objective) of being tested with the Sharī’ah.

Ash-Shāṭbī raḥimahullāh said, ‘The Maqṣad of adhering to the Sharī’ah is to get the person to let go of his desires in order to become a willing slave of Allāh Ta’ālā.’

The Modernist Defence

Modernists tend to begin their downward spiral by offering an Islāmically flavoured idea, rooted in un-Islāmic belief, with a smiling face but later become very hard upon their flawed way. After this, they turn on those who object to their waywardness by playing the victim. In defence of their ideology that has no root in Islāmic tradition, they call for decorum and respect.

Well, decorum and respect are lofty character traits. However, in the mind of the Modernist, decorum and respect is only what he or she feels is decorum and respect. Hence, for all practical purposes, there is no standard of what decorum and respect are. Anything spoken contrary to the Modernist ideology or any attempt to command the good and forbid evil is seen as an attack. This, as we can see, creates a very serious problem and precarious situation for the genuine and true Muslim.

So, coming to the on-the-ground reality, a call is made to the Modernist to review his or her standard of decorum and respect and inform the Muslim Ummah of it. In brief, any attempt to bring the Modernist to the table and have a respectful discussion is seen as an

attack, why? Because the Modernist does not want to budge at all and move from his or her position of following his or her desires.

Summary of the message:

1. The un-Islāmic ideas offered by the Modernists are based on following their desires and whims.
2. The objective of the Modernist is to render the Sharī'ah null and void.
3. Modernist ideology cannot be viewed as a Fiqhī Ikhtilāf.
4. Modernists do not have a standard of decorum and respect.
5. The Modernist must review his or her position and then judge it in the light of the Noble Qur'ān and Blessed Sunnah.
6. The concept of Ikhtilāf is being abused by the Modernists to justify their flawed positions.
7. Ikhtilāf cannot stand as proof to pick and choose whatever ruling a person wants to carry out.
8. The Modernists should take a hard look in the mirror and ask themselves why they are being so dogmatic and simply brush everything aside to fulfil their whims and desires.

Sources:

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2. Using Disagreements as an Excuse to Follow Concessions, Shaykh 'Abdullāh Ibn Ṣālih Al-'Ujayrī